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THE FALL OF MAN

Rev. M. V. McDonough

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THE FALL OF MAN

BY

REV. M. V. McDONOUGH

*Author of "The Chief Sources of Sin" and "One Year
With God"*



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Dedication



The author dedicates this little book (*and its royalties and profits*) to the Boston Poor Clares, who typify so well in the midst of our modern world the ancient spirit of the Poverello of Assissi, with its rapt contemplation, voluntary poverty, severe simplicity and utter unworldiness. And may St. Francis and St. Clare, therefore, deign to bless the little work and render it fruitful a hundred-fold for God and souls.

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BEFORE THE FALL

I. BEFORE THE FALL.

Our first parents and the fall of man—the first man and woman who ever lived upon this earth and breathed this air, the man and woman from whom we are descended, even as we are descended from our grandfathers and grandmothers, we call these our first parents; their terrible downfall, and in their downfall the fall also of their children and grandchildren, of all their posterity, including ourselves, of the whole human race which is descended from them, their terrible downfall from that wonderful life of Eden to this common life of earth, from happiness and enlightenment into misery and ignorance, from innocence and holiness into sin and depravity—we call this downfall the fall

of man. And these two subjects, the fall of man, and the man and woman our first parents who were the guilty agents in that fall, make up the substance of this book.

The Catechism teaches us that "the first man and woman were Adam and Eve," and that "Adam and Eve were innocent and holy when they came from the hand of God;" but "to try their obedience God commanded Adam and Eve not to eat of a certain fruit which grew in the garden of paradise."

If they had only obeyed this commandment, they would have remained innocent and holy forever. If they had only been true to God in this one particular, they would have secured for themselves, and for us their children, "a constant state of happiness in this life and everlasting glory

in the next," and they and we would finally have passed without suffering or death from paradise to heaven.

The Sacred Scriptures tell us that "the Lord God had planted a paradise of pleasure from the beginning, wherein He placed man whom He had formed. And the Lord God brought forth of the ground all manner of trees, fair to behold, and pleasant to eat of; the tree of life, also in the midst of paradise; and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. And a river went out of the place of pleasure to water paradise. * * * And the Lord God took man, and put him into the paradise of pleasure" (Gen., ii., 8-15).

Let us consider the great happiness of our first parents in that garden of Eden before thier fall, so that we may under-

stand better than ever what infinite goodness God has always shown to His human children.

We shall see that whatever evil there is on this earth, did not come from God, but from man, and from man's sin, and from man's bitter enemy—Satan. We shall find that God created mankind for happiness—not only for perfect happiness in heaven, but also, even before we should reach heaven, for continual happiness upon this earth. He did not intend that we should live this present life with its mingled joy and pain, but He intended that we should never suffer one moment's pain or one moment's grief, that we should never fall into sin, nor ever taste of death. Yet He gave us freedom; because without freedom there is no nobil-

ity, without freedom there is no merit. If He had not given us this free-will which we have and this free-choice between good and evil, we would be like brute animals or mere machines, rather than rational beings. We would scarcely be men and women at all, without freedom. Therefore, God gave us freedom at our creation. And we used that freedom which He gave us, at the very beginning, as we too often use it now, to turn against Him. Then sin against Him brought upon us sickness and death and depravity and ignorance, and every other evil in its train.

You may meet people who are bad enough to blame God for their miseries. Therefore, know now and understand well that God never made misery, that

God has never caused the wretchedness of any human being. Human happiness comes from God; but human misery has always come either from man himself or from the devil, man's mortal enemy.

There was no misery in paradise. "In paradise," says St. Augustine, "man lived as he wished, so long as what he wished was what God had commanded. He lived there, enjoying God, from Whose goodness he was good. He lived without any needs, without any unsatisfied cravings; and he had it in his power to always live thus. Food was there, lest he should hunger; drink, lest he should thirst; the tree of life, lest old age should bring him death or weakness. He experienced no corruption in his body; neither pains nor aches disturbed his senses. No sickness

was to be dreaded from within, no blow nor accident from without. Most perfect health in the flesh, complete tranquillity in the spirit. No sadness, no immoderate gayety, but in place of these a supreme joy—a joy made perpetual by God, for Whom he burned with love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”

How happy the man and woman must have been in that bright beginning of their existence!

First, their bodies were filled with glorious health and strength—such health and strength as since that day no human being has ever known or dreamed of. And it was health which would never pass away. No death should end it, no disease would undermine it, no ill-

ness would come upon them to disturb it. Old age itself would be like youth, as strong, as buoyant, as free from weakness and from aches and pains.

Then their minds were overflowing with knowledge and wisdom. They knew God as on this earth we can never hope to know Him. They understood nature and nature's secrets far better than any philosopher or scientist has ever understood them, far better than all the wise and cultured men of all the centuries to come will ever be able to learn them. Their minds were fresh and vigorous, powerful with an almost superhuman power. Not even Julius Cæsar himself, nor Napoleon, nor Shakespeare, nor St. Thomas Aquinas, nor any other world-wonder, was blessed with such superb

powers of mind as those which were given to Adam and Eve. "God created man of the earth, and made him after His own image," says the Book of Ecclesiasticus. "He created of him a helpmate like to Himself; He gave them counsel, and a tongue, and eyes and ears, and a heart to devise; and He filled them with the knowledge of understanding. He created in them the science of the spirit. He filled their heart with wisdom" (Ecclus., xvii., 1-6).

But best of all, their souls were innocent and holy, as free from sin as the soul of a saint in heaven. God's supernatural grace and justice sanctified those souls from the very moment of their creation. God's monitor, conscience, was in their breasts, as it is in ours. But conscience

could only warn them and direct their future; it could neither reproach them with guilt in the past, nor point to any fault in the present. Peace and cheerfulness and perpetual joy lighted up those souls of our first parents, as the sunshine lights up the meadows of spring; and all the virtues flourished in them like flowers in a beautiful garden. And the angels of heaven stooped down to reverence and love those radiant souls. And God was well pleased with the work of His hands.

Thus in their glorious beauty and with their marvelous gifts of soul and body, they dwelt in paradise. The earth was theirs, "and the fullness thereof"; and it was an earth unmarred by evil, unstained by crime, freshly created in its primeval loveliness, their house and home made

ready for them by the Lord God, Who in His infinite bounty had called them out of nothingness. Around them were all the charms of newly created nature. A purer green spread over hill and dale than ever greets our eyes in the loveliest spring-time. The flowers were sweeter, the fruits were more delicious, a richer foliage covered tree and herb. We may well think that even the sun itself shone down upon them more radiantly and more serenely through a clearer and balmier air—through an air as clear and balmy as the consciences within their breasts.

What pure and undefiled consciences—what beautiful, bright souls were theirs—fresh from the hands of God—free not only from sin, but even from that leaning towards sin, that proneness to evil, which

our depraved nature has constantly to fight against. In fallen human nature there is disagreement between soul and body. The body would have us be base and groveling animals, the soul would make us angels of light; it is like the boys' game, tug-of-war, the body pulling one way, the soul another. But with our first parents flesh and spirit were in sweet accord. Their bodies were in harmony with their souls, even as their souls were in harmony with God.

They had no deplorable past to look back upon, no threatening future to dread and be anxious about. Their minds were free from care. Without toil or fatigue, without plotting or planning, all that they needed was ready to their hands; and all pleasures and delights were spread out

before them. Pain or misery could never enter into their lives so long as they were true to God. They had not death to fear, either for themselves or for those whom they would love. So long as they were true to God, they could never die. Mortal in nature, like ours, their bodies were; but immortal through God's gift above nature. God would have kept them from dying by His supernatural power. He would have warded off poison, wounds, accidents, sickness — everything which might cause their death, or injure their health, or lessen their enjoyment of life — if they had only been true to Him. And safe and secure in their unbroken happiness, they would have gone through earth-life; and finally, without crossing the dark

portals of death, would have passed from paradise to heaven.

This was the existence for which God created mankind, the life in paradise; how vastly different from our earthly life! These were the joys of our first parents in that garden of Eden; and these were the joys which the divine Creator intended, not only for them, but for the entire human race which has descended from them: unbroken happiness on earth, to be followed later on by perfect happiness in heaven.

Therefore, let us thank God for the infinite goodness which He has shown to us and to our race from the very beginning. True, we have lost paradise through the sin of our first parents. True we have inherited from them a tarnished, guilt-

stained nature, doomed, even after baptism has washed away its original sin, to the death and the human miseries which are punishments of that sin. Every individual of Adam's race, every human life has its share of those punishments, its portion of those miseries and its certainty of that death.

Yet by means of these very penalties, inflicted upon our human nature for its original sin, we may hope to regain paradise. By bearing patiently the pains and ills of this brief life, by bravely conquering its temptations, and by dying its death when God calls us, with resignation to His holy will, we may hope to win that better paradise which we name heaven.

Through the man Adam we have lost Eden; and through the God-man Christ

we shall regain Eden. The apostle tells us that "as by the disobedience of one man many were made sinners, so also by the obedience of One many shall be made just" (Rom., v., 19); and such is our certain trust and hope. We have lost the joys of paradise by the disobedience of our father Adam; but through the obedience "unto death, even unto the death of the cross," of our divine Saviour Jesus Christ, and through our obedience unto Him and to His Church, we will win the joys of heaven.

THE FALL OF MAN

II. THE FALL OF MAN.

“To try their obedience God commanded Adam and Eve not to eat of a certain fruit which grew in the garden of paradise.”

Adam and Eve owed everything to God, even their very existence. For the Lord God formed man out of the slime of the earth; and breathed into his face the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (Gen., ii., 7). Anyone would think that thankfulness and gratitude to their Creator, if nothing else, would lead them to obey Him.

Gratitude helps children to obey their parents. When you begin your life upon this earth, you soon understand how much you owe to your father and mother. You

know that it is they who brought you into this world, that it is they who toil for you and provide for you, giving you clothes and food and pleasant homes and everything you have; and if you were good children, thankfulness and gratitude to your father and mother, if nothing else, would lead you to obey them.

Now just think of all that Adam and Eve owed to God. They owed Him their existence and their unspoiled human nature; they owed Him the supernatural grace and justice, the harmony of soul with body, the knowledge and wisdom, the immortality, all of which He had generously added on to that nature; they owed Him the glorious world which He had created out of nothing, the "paradise of pleasure" which He had planted for

them, the splendid happiness they enjoyed in that paradise, and the perfect and eternal blessedness of heaven, with its Beatific Vision, which would come to them later on.

All of this Adam and Eve owed to God, and surely thankfulness for all this should have prompted them to obey His command. It was an easy commandment, too, not burdensome to live under, nor hard to obey. There was just one tree in Eden whose fruit they must not touch. "Of every tree of paradise thou shalt eat," God said to them (Gen., ii., 16), but He made this one exception, and He told them what would be the consequences of their disobedience. They were plainly warned by Him that if they did not obey this Divine commandment, death would follow:

“In what day soever thou shalt eat of it, thou shalt die the death” (Gen., ii., 17).

Now with this terrible death-penalty threatening them for their disobedience, and with so many motives for thankfulness and gratitude, “did Adam and Eve remain faithful to God? Adam and Eve did not remain faithful to God, but broke His command by eating the forbidden fruit”; and on account of this sin they “lost innocence and holiness, and were doomed to sickness and death.” It was thus that “by one man sin entered into this world, and by sin death, and so death passed upon all men in whom all have sinned” (Rom., v., 12).

The inspired Book of Wisdom declares to us that “by the envy of the devil death came into the world” (Wisd., ii., 24).

“He was a murderer from the beginning,” as our divine Saviour told the Pharisees, “and he stood not in the truth, because truth is not in him: when he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own, for he is a liar, and the father thereof” (John, viii., 44). He had himself fallen from innocence and holiness into sin and eternal misery, and, envying the happiness of mankind, he determined to make them fall, too. Now he could not force them; he could only persuade. God had given them free-will, and Satan could not destroy that freedom nor take away from them the power of choosing. He could only influence their choice. So he appeared to the weaker of the two in the form of a fascinating serpent. And lying according to his fallen nature, and

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blasphemously contradicting the words of God, "the serpent said to the woman: 'No, you shall not die the death. For God doth know that in what day soever you shall eat thereof, your eyes shall be opened: and you shall be as gods knowing good and evil.' And the woman saw that the tree was good to eat, and fair to the eyes, and delightful to behold: and she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave to her husband, who did eat" (Gen., iii., 4-6).

It was a mortal sin of the most abominable nature. To deny that it was a mortal sin, would be denying the faith and falling into heresy. We can easily understand that it was no venial sin of petty theft. If it were simply a matter of stealing a pear or an orange, of course the sin

would be much smaller. So far as stealing is concerned, one would have to steal something of more value than a bit of fruit to commit a mortal sin. But this was no sin of stealing, either small or great. It was a sin of brazen disobedience to a strict and absolute command of the divine Creator. It was a sin of foolish and blasphemous pride, like the sin of Lucifer in heaven, for they committed it in the hope of becoming "as gods." It was a sin of unbelief and infidelity, for, instead of trusting and crediting the words of God, they placed their faith in the lying promises of the evil one. And it was a sin of the basest ingratitude.

In all these respects the sin of our first parents was a mortal sin. It was not simply a venial fault, such as displeases God slightly without making us entirely

unworthy of His friendship, and is punished only for a time; but it was one of those great sins, and probably the very worst of those great sins which offend God grievously, destroy His friendship for us, and are punished forever and ever, unless forgiven before the sinner dies.

By that awful act of disobedience, blasphemous pride, infidelity and ingratitude, Adam and Eve had placed upon themselves and upon the human nature which they must hand down to their descendents, the stain of original sin. Henceforth each one of us to the end of time would enter this world with that human nature of ours dimmed and tarnished by the guilt-stain of Adam's disobedience and deprived of the grace and justice which it ought to possess. Henceforth we would neither

be free from pain and grief, nor escape from death. No longer for men and women would this beautiful earth be a place of unmixed happiness. "Cursed is the earth in thy work," God said to Adam, and in Adam to those who would inherit Adam's sin-stained nature: "with labour and toil shalt thou eat thereof all the days of thy life. Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee, and thou shalt eat the herbs of the earth. In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return to the earth, out of which thou wast taken: for dust thou art, and into dust thou shalt return" (Gen., iii., 17-19).

So the puny man and woman, formed of the slime of the earth, despised the command of an almighty Creator and fell under His anger and indignation; and so

through that vile rebellion mankind, in the persons of our first parents, went forth from paradise. It was the fall of man. It was the bitter ending of primeval happiness.

But even on that dark day a light shone forth, and in the very midst of His stern justice God allowed them a glimpse of His infinitely tender mercy. Even in that hour of gloom and sorrow He spoke of the future Redeemer, and enkindled in their hearts the hope of forgiveness for their sin, the hope of some time winning a brighter paradise than that which they had lost, the hope of gaining back even their human bodies from the jaws of death by a glorious resurrection.

“From the woman came the beginning of sin, and through her we all die,” says

the inspired Book of Ecclesiasticus (Eccclus., xxv., 33). So also from the woman would come the beginning of redemption. She would be the blessed mother of our divine Saviour. She would give birth to Him Who would atone for Adam's sin and conquer Adam's enemy. And in the very hour of man's tremendous fall "the Lord God said to the serpent: ' * * * I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed: she shall crush thy head, and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel' " (Gen., iii., 15).

In that bright hope we sin-stained mortals live our lives and die our deaths: rather *now*, in the realization of that hope; because already long before our time the woman has crushed the serpent's head; long before we were born our

blessed Saviour, as truly the Son of Mary as He is truly the Son of God, lived His most beautiful life upon this earth and suffered His passion and died His death to atone for Adam's sin and ours; long before our birth He rose triumphant from the grave, victorious over death and sin and Satan.

"Now Christ is risen from the dead, the first-fruit of them that sleep," wrote the Apostle; "for by a man came death, and by a man the resurrection of the dead; and as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive" (I. Cor., xv., 20-22). He died for us, He conquered death for us; but we must apply to ourselves the fruits of His conquest. "He Who created you without your aid," said St. Augustine, "will not save you without your

aid." It is free-will again, the choice between God and Satan, which will always be left to us until we breathe our last breath. He died for us; but He will not force us into heaven nor bring us there, as a stone or a log of wood might be brought, against our will. And therefore, in our redemption, we must be fellow-workers with our divine Saviour. We must regularly say our prayers and frequently, "daily, if possible," make use of the sacraments, and in every way strive to join our little, humble efforts with the great graces which God is continually pouring upon us.

Finally, our turn will come and we will see "the last of earth." The body's eyes will close upon this world; the spirit's eyes will open to another. In heaven we

will gain a happiness far greater than the lost happiness of paradise; and from the overthrow of our race, from the fall of man, we will rise victorious into the glory from which we can never fall, where there will be no more trying of obedience, no more temptation, no more of struggling, but only the supreme blessedness of the Vision forever and ever.

OUR FALLEN NATURE

III. OUR FALLEN NATURE.

The Catechism teaches us that "our nature was corrupted by the sin of our first parents."

It is easy to see how *their* nature was corrupted by it. You can't pour poison into a glass of clear water, nor sin into a healthy human soul without defiling the purity of them; and when we realize what a terrible offence against God their sin was, what foul abominations of defiant disobedience and blasphemous pride and infidelity and base ingratitude were heaped up in their sin, we can understand how fearfully it must have spoiled and corrupted the beautiful human nature which God had given them.

Now the nature of our first parents is our nature. Defiled and corrupted as it was, they had to hand it down to their children. Every individual of the human race received it, passed down from Adam and Eve through so many generations. So that you cannot be a man or woman at all, nor even a new-born babe, without sharing that human nature which Adam and Eve spoiled.

On the other hand, we would "have shared in their happiness if they had remained faithful." If they in their perfect freedom had chosen to obey God's commandment rather than disobey it, we would partake with them in the joys and graces of paradise. But since they chose to disobey, we, as we inherit their human nature, so also share in the sin and pun-

ishment which through their action fell upon it. The *act* of sin was theirs alone; but the guilt of the sin, and the deprivations, corruption and defilement which are temporal punishments of that guilt, are all transmitted to us. And even after the guilt of the original sin is washed away in baptism, there is still left to us its temporal punishment, the corruption of our human nature.

Now, what is nature? And what is human nature? Nature is that which makes anything what it is; and human nature is that which makes anyone human. A tree has tree-nature. If you had bird-nature, you would be a bird. But, having human nature, you are a human being. Of course, human nature comprises soul and body: the human body, with its erect posture

and beautiful form; the human soul, with its noble faculties of will and memory and understanding. And both body and soul, in a word, every part, every element of our human nature, has been more or less spoiled and corrupted by the sin of our first parents. For that sin not only "darkened our understanding, weakened our will and left in us a strong inclination to evil," but also doomed our body "to sickness and death."

Our bodies lack that pristine strength and vigor which they would have enjoyed but for Adam's sin. In paradise the body neither knew weakness, nor felt pain, nor suffered sickness; but here pain is sometimes its portion, and weakness sooner or later is sure to come to it, and no matter how strong it may be, it will yield in time

either to disease or old age. There the body was destined to a deathless life, secure of immortality; it would live forever—in paradise for a time, in heaven afterwards—and would never taste of death. Here, no matter how much we love life, we are certain to part with it; and though we watch and guard ourselves from morning to night, and worry our lives out to cling to our lives, we know that finally death will be the end of it all. Truly, as holy Job teaches, “man, born of a woman, living for a short time, is filled with many miseries” (Job., xiv., 1), and his body shares with his mind and heart in the corruption which Adam’s sin brought down upon human nature.

The mind or understanding, wonderful as it still is, has suffered a great darkening

and overclouding from the sin in paradise. What dense ignorance there is in the world, and how little we know or can know here in our fallen state! How hard it is to learn and how easy to forget! What nonsense people choose to talk about, what silly stuff they read! Out of twenty book-readers, for example, nineteen read only novels. Certainly it is a darkened and diseased understanding which can feed itself entirely with that sort of food. I don't deny that a good novel or short story may be wholesome now and then, especially after a meal of more substantial mind-food; but to feed the mind entirely on novels is as senseless as it would be to feed the body on dust. After all, there is wisdom in the old saying: "Tell me what your reading is, and

I will tell you what your understanding is." And certainly, to judge from the books most people read and the popular magazines and newspapers they devour, the ordinary human intellect must be darkened and enfeebled, indeed. It is no longer the keen, well-balanced mind of Adam. In the average man or woman it is not even healthy and sensible. The physicians will tell us this, particularly those who are in charge of hospitals for the insane and are brain specialists. They assure us that with insanity it is only a question of degree, that no human mind is thoroughly sound and sane. And when we see the ignorance and folly that are rampant even in our partly Christian lands, we can imagine how densely overclouded the minds of men and women

must be in savage and half-civilized countries.

Thus the sin of our first parents has darkened the human understanding. In like manner it has weakened the human will. Before that sin was committed the will of man and woman was strong as steel. Whatever they might do, was done deliberately and calmly, and their actions did not spring from human weakness. This is one of the reasons why the original sin was so horrible: it was committed with a clearer understanding and a fuller and stronger consent of the will than have accompanied any other human sin. For ever since the fall the human will has been greatly weakened. Adam and Eve were like sturdy oak trees for strength of will, while their descendents are like reeds,

which every little breeze can sway from their purpose. They are like brittle glass, which a child can break. We make up our minds to be good, and the first breath of strong temptation blows us back into badness again. We sincerely say the Act of Contrition, really feeling sorrow for sin and with a real purpose to amend our lives, but a few months afterwards how easily that purpose is swept away! And so it has always been, ever since our first parents gave way to the tempter and corrupted our human nature, darkening our understanding and weakening our will.

Finally, the fall of man has "left in us a strong inclination to evil." On account of the corruption of our nature which followed its rebellion against God, we are naturally inclined to evil rather than to

good. It requires hard work and a strong effort to be really good; but we can be bad without any effort at all. How easy it seems to disobey one's parents, to break the commandments, to have one's own way and be selfish! How hard it is to be wise and docile, and to practise virtue! Now this proneness to evil in us is one other manifestation of the corruption of our nature, spoiled, but thank God, not entirely destroyed, by the sin of our first parents.

"Poor depraved humanity," people some times say when they notice the material, money-worshiping spirit of the world around them, or when they see some degenerate half-idiot besotted by his vices; "poor fallen human nature!"

And yet our view of this depraved nature of ours should not be too gloomy a one. For, notwithstanding the brief span of years allotted to us, which makes our life on earth resemble the little momentary lives of insects, and notwithstanding the death which is certain to sweep us away from the face of the earth, and notwithstanding the ignorance of our mind and the feebleness of our will and the natural depravity which inclines us to evil, we still have left to us enough and plenty to be thankful for. We must say, after all, that ours is a glorious destiny. Our present may seem paltry and contemptible, but our future is grand and magnificent beyond the power of words to express.

God Himself, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, the only-begotten Son of the almighty Father, has redeemed us. Long ago He came down upon earth and became one of us, taking our human nature upon Himself; and He has thus raised up our nature to a state and dignity which it never had before, not even in paradise. He has infinitely ennobled the human body and the human soul. The understanding, in us so ignorant and darkened, the will, so terribly enfeebled, are in Him immeasurably bright and magnificently powerful; while the human body, so puny and frail in us, is seated now "at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from whence *He* shall come to judge the living and the dead."

If we only strive to love Him and to live for Him, if we place ourselves in His hands, believing in Him, trusting to Him, obeying Him, all will be well with us. He will give us after this short life on earth the long, unending life of heaven. He will enlighten our darkened minds and little by little strengthen our enfeebled wills, and, notwithstanding our proneness to evil, gradually draw us on towards good.

For He knows and compassionates the corruption of our fallen nature, and He has suffered and died to redeem us. He is Compassion itself. He is Pity and Infinite Mercy. "He hath not dealt with us according to our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For, according to the height of the heaven above the

earth, He hath strengthened His mercy towards them that fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our iniquities from us. As a father hath compassion on his children, so hath the Lord compassion on them that fear Him. *For He knoweth our frame.* He remembereth that we are dust. Man's days are as grass; as the flower of the field, so shall he flourish; for the spirit shall pass in him, and he shall not be, and he shall know his place no more. But the mercy of the Lord is from eternity and unto eternity upon them that fear Him" (Ps., cii., 10-17).

ORIGINAL SIN

IV. ORIGINAL SIN.

“The sin which we inherit from our first parents is called original sin”; and it “is called original because it comes down to us from our first parents, and we are brought into the world with its guilt on our soul.”

Of course, original sin is the sin of origin; now the origin of anything is its source or beginning. So this sin is called original, because it descends down to us from the origin—that is, the source or beginning of our race in Adam and Eve; and also because it is in our souls at the very origin of our own lives in birth.

The doctrine of original sin is one of the mysteries of our religion. It is a mystery, that is, “a truth which we cannot fully understand”; yet, although we cannot thor-

oughly comprehend this truth, a little consideration will show us that there is nothing unreasonable about it. Like all the other mysteries of our holy religion, it is above reason, but not against reason.

And it is held and believed by Catholics now in precisely the same sense in which it has been held and believed from the beginning. In fact, the doctrines of our holy Church never change but to develop. They grow clearer and fuller as the centuries go on, even as a flourishing tree grows upwards and outwards; but they never take a backward step. In the true Church what has once been a matter of faith, is a matter of faith forever.

So with this doctrine of original sin. It is one of those important truths of faith which we have to believe and assent to in

order to be Catholics at all. So we believe in it today precisely as Catholics believed in it sixteen hundred years ago in the time of St. Augustine, or earlier still, when it was embodied in the Sacred Scriptures by the inspired writers, and particularly in the epistles of St. Paul.

Thus St. Paul wrote in his epistle to the Romans: "By one man sin entered into this world, and by sin, death; and so death passed upon all men, in whom all have sinned" (Rom., v., 12). And again he said: "By the disobedience of one man many were made sinners" (Rom., v., 19).

Now how were *we* "made sinners" by the disobedience of Adam? Does the inspired apostle mean to declare in the Sacred Scriptures in his Epistle to the Romans that *we* ate the forbidden fruit, or

that we personally committed any sinful *action* when Adam and Eve ate it? No, certainly not. The *act* of original sin was no act of ours! it was the act of our first parents alone.

And the mystery of the doctrine is at this very point—namely, that, although we did not commit the *action* of original sin, nevertheless, the *guilt* of original sin is on our souls, or was until our baptism. We “were made sinners” by the disobedience of Adam, not in the sense that we actually committed Adam’s disobedience, but only in the sense that our souls before baptism were stained with the guilt of Adam’s disobedience; in other words, we share that human nature, and in order to be men and women have to share that human nature which Adam and Eve

smirched with guilt by their disobedience to the Creator.

Let us try to form some sort of a notion of what this guilt is, which is in our souls when we are born. The Council of Trent teaches us that this guilt of original sin is "the death of the soul." The soul has not its original life: For the grace of God is the life of our soul; and the soul born in original sin, dead-born as we might say, is empty of God's grace and justice; worse still, it not merely lacks them, but has been deprived of them by Adam's sin. It is not so much that anything new has been put into the soul through Adam's sin, as that what used to be in it and ought to be in it, has been taken away from it.

In a similar way, the death of the body is not anything new coming into the body; but it is rather that something old and familiar has left the body. The corpse of this moment is the same body which was living one moment ago; nothing new has come into it; but the life and soul which were in it one moment ago and which made it then a living body, have left it. Now a stone, *lacking* the life which it never had and was never intended to have, is not a corpse, but a body, *deprived* of the life which it used to have and ought to have, is a corpse. And so with that "death of the soul" which we commonly call the guilt of original sin.

This guilt then, according to the Council of Trent, is not merely a *lack* of grace and justice, but a *deprivation* of them.

To make this distinction between the lack of anything and the deprivation of anything still clearer, we may remember that in the brute animals also there is a lack of grace and justice; but there is no deprivation of grace and justice in the brute animals, and no guilt. The animals, of course, were never made in God's image, nor given a rational soul with which to know right from wrong, nor free-will, with which to choose between good and evil; and while they are without grace and justice, they have not been *deprived* of them, because they never had them and never could have them. In their case then there is no guilt in being without grace, because they are incapable of grace, and because it was never intended by God that they should have it. But in

our case the lack of grace in our souls before baptism is a deprivation, through Adam's disobedience, of something which our souls should have and were intended by God to have; and this privation of sanctifying and justifying grace, or "death of the soul," or guilt of original sin, whichever we may name it, renders us, until our baptism, sinners, children of wrath, enemies of God, and not actively, of course, but at least habitually and negatively, turned away from God.

If God had formed each one of us as He formed Adam, directly "from the slime of the earth," it would be a different dispensation. But that was not the Divine plan. God directly formed only our first parents, while the rest of mankind He formed indirectly and through

them. The entire human race must descend from that first man and woman, and all men and women of all times must receive from Adam and Eve and through Adam and Eve the human nature which God had given clean and undefiled, and which they had stained with sin.

Besides giving them human nature, God gave our first parents, not for themselves alone, but for us as well, many things which were above nature, many supernatural gifts. Immortality, or freedom from death and sickness, was one of these; it was not natural, but was above their nature and supernatural. The perfect harmony and agreement of the body with the soul, and of the soul with God, was another of these gifts of God. Still another was the happiness of paradise.

But by far the best and greatest of all these supernatural gifts were this grace and justice, this supernatural life, with which He filled their souls; because it was this grace and justice, this life of the soul, which raised man and woman to the friendship of God and elevated them far above their nature, fitting them for the eternal and more than human happiness of heaven.

All these supernatural gifts we lost through Adam's sin. The best of them all, the grace and justice, which are the life of our souls, we regained through the merits of Christ's atonement for us applied to us in baptism, unless, indeed, we have lost it again since then, or since our last Confession, by *our own act*, that is, by mortal sin. But the others of these

gifts of God, the immortality, integrity and happiness of paradise, we will never regain until after we die the death which it is appointed for all men once to die.

Let us remember, though, that all these gifts which we lost through Adam's sin, were not any part of our nature, but were above nature, or supernatural. God was not content with giving Adam and Eve their humanity, but in His infinite goodness and bounty He added on to their humanity all these other gifts of grace and justice and immortality and happiness. And it was His kind and merciful intention that our first parents, by being faithful to His commandment, should hand down to us not only their human nature, but also these gifts above human nature with which God had clothed it.

First, however, He tried their obedience. Even the angels in heaven were not beyond trial, until after they had proved their faithfulness to Almighty God. You will remember that many of them failed in the trial and fell from heaven with Lucifer. So it is not wonderful that men and women should be under trial, too. And God gave Adam and Eve just one commandment, and told them plainly what would be the consequences of breaking it. Then He left them free, as He had left the angels free, to obey or disobey. He would not force them to obey; because what merit or what nobility would there be in a forced obedience? To force them would be to destroy their freedom; and to destroy man's freedom would be to destroy his very nature.

Even when they disobeyed, their human nature still remained to them, corrupted it is true, yet not destroyed; but the gifts above nature, the supernatural gifts of grace and justice, the soul's life, and of immortality and integrity and happiness, which God had connected with that human nature, were all swept away. And on account of their disobedience, when we at our birth receive the human nature which they have handed down to us, it is not only spoiled and corrupted in itself, but also deprived of those gifts above it which ought to belong to it.

Now our deprivation of these supernatural gifts is what we mean by original sin and its punishment: our deprivation of sanctifying and justifying grace is the guilt-stain of original sin; while our de-

privation of integrity, immortality of the body and happiness, together with the corruption of our fallen nature, make up its temporal punishment.

Through the sin of our first parents, then, we are all born in a lower state than the state for which God created us. We are born, not in the state of grace, but in the state of sin. When a person's soul is in the state of grace, it is in a very high and elevated state. It is in a state immensely higher than the state of kings. Because, for all the majesty and dignity of kings, the state and condition of a king is only natural; while to be in the state of grace is not merely natural, but is more than natural and far higher than natural; to be in the state of grace, is to enjoy an elevation divinely supernatural. And

that all men and women are born into this world lacking that elevation, or rather *deprived* of that elevation through Adam's iniquity—this is what is taught in the doctrine of original sin.

Even by the sin of Adam man did not lose what strictly belonged to his nature, but only the elevation and the supernatural gifts which God's liberality had added on to his nature. Human nature even after the fall was still complete and intact. As we still have hands and feet and every part of the human body, so we still have understanding and will and every faculty of the human soul. We receive at birth the whole of human nature, corrupted and weakened, but not essentially destroyed, nor even essentially mutilated. What we have lost for a time

through the sin of our first parents—what will be restored to us, if we do right, through Christ's passion and death, partly even in this life, but entirely in the life to come—are the original grace and justice, integrity, immortality, peace and happiness—the more than human gifts and favours which our infinitely bountiful God at the creation so liberally and so generously poured forth upon the human race.

So this is the teaching of the Church and the Bible in regard to original sin. Many persons may have false and foolish notions about it, which we must strive to keep out of our minds. We should remember that so far as the actual committing of the original sin is concerned, neither we, nor our parents, or grandparents, nor any other or others of Adam's

children, had anything to do with that. For us it is a sin, not in itself, but only in relation to Adam's sin. It is a sin, not of our will, but only in relation to Adam's will. The turning away from God on our part is not a positive turning-away, but only a negative turning-away, from lack, or rather *deprivation*, of turning to Him. In one word, original sin is not actual sin; it was actual sin for Adam and Eve alone, who alone actually committed it. Nevertheless, the guilt-stain of it remains until baptism in the nature and on the souls of all their children. For, although we children of Adam did not personally sin in paradise, yet in the persons of our first parents our nature sinned in paradise.

We may notice even in ourselves that the human person and the human nature, although in reality one and united, yet may be considered as different and distinct from each other. The person or personality makes you just precisely the individual that you are; the nature makes you a human being. The person makes you John or Elizabeth; the nature makes you man or woman. The person or personality belongs, you might say, to you alone. But the human nature belongs, not only to you, but also to all the other individuals of your race—that is, to every human being.

Now a great Doctor of the Church, St. Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury, has well said that “in the beginning the person deprived the nature of grace and jus-

tice; ever afterwards the nature deprives the person of them." And of course his meaning is that in paradise the person, Adam, deprived human nature of grace or, in other words, stained human nature with original sin; while ever since then human nature deprives every person of grace or, in other words, stains every person with original sin who partakes of human nature, and who has to partake of human nature in order to be a person at all.

Thus you cannot inherit your father's money without inheriting his debts; you cannot inherit a mortgaged farm without inheriting both farm and mortgage; you cannot receive soiled writing-paper without receiving both the paper and the ink-stain which soils it; neither can you at

your birth receive the damaged human nature which our first parents have passed down to you through so many generations, without receiving with that nature the stain of original sin which they put upon it in the garden of Eden by defying God's command.

And hence the necessity of atonement and redemption, the supreme usefulness of our divine Saviour's passion and death for us. Hence also the dire necessity of baptism—baptism, that is, either of water or of blood or of desire—which baptism by our Saviour's ordinance restores to our stained and still-born souls the grace and life which by His passion He won back for us. “‘Unless a man be born again,’” He said to Nicodemus, “‘he cannot see the kingdom of God.’” Nicodemus saith

to Him: 'How can a man be born again when he is old?' * * * Jesus answered: 'Amen, amen, I say to thee, unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God' " (John iii., 3-5. The merit and the grace which Christ won for men and women on the cross, must be applied to human souls in baptism in order to wash away original sin.

Yet even when our guilt has been washed away, even when sanctifying grace and justice are restored to us at baptism, those other lesser supernatural gifts of God are not restored. For immortality of the body or freedom from death and sickness, for perfect harmony of soul with body, and for the lost happiness of Eden, we must wait until the

dawning of our glorious future life. "If in this life alone we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable," said the great Apostle. "But now Christ is risen from the dead, the first-fruit of them that sleep. For by a man came death, and by a Man the resurrection of the dead. And as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive. But everyone in his own order: the First-Fruits, Christ: then they that are of Christ, who have believed in His coming. Afterwards the end: when He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God and the Father, when He shall have brought to naught all principality, and power, and virtue. For He must reign until He hath put all His enemies under His feet. And the enemy death shall be destroyed last" (I. Cor., xv., 19-26).

THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

V. THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION.

Only one person out of all the myriads who have descended from Adam was ever preserved from original sin. Many millions of persons have been cleansed and purified from original sin by baptism, but only one person was ever entirely preserved from it from the first moment of existence, so as not to need to be purified.

Of course, we do not speak of our divine Saviour. When we talk of sin, we leave Him out of the question entirely; and besides, although He has a human nature, He is not a human person; He is a Divine Person, possessing two natures—the divine nature and the human nature. He is God as well as man, and it would be

absurd to even dream that any kind of sin could ever touch Him.

Leaving Him out of the question then and speaking only of those who are merely human like ourselves, we say that among the millions and millions of human beings who have been born or will be born during all the centuries of time, only one was ever preserved from original sin; and that one was our Divine Saviour's holy Mother. The spotless or immaculate Virgin never shared in Adam's fall, nor was stained by Adam's guilt. In the words of the Catechism, "the Blessed Virgin Mary, through the merits of her Divine Son, was preserved free from the guilt of original sin; and this privilege is called her Immaculate Conception."

It is quite plain then that our Catholic doctrine of the Immaculate Conception has nothing to do with the birth of Christ Himself, but only with the birth of Christ's blessed Mother. And it is well for all to understand this thoroughly; because there are certain persons outside of the Church, ill-informed on this point, who imagine that our doctrine of the Immaculate Conception teaches that other sacred mystery of Christ's birth from Mary without a human father. Catholics, however, realize well the difference between our Saviour's virginal birth and Mary's immaculate birth and conception. And, like the rest, we also shall always realize it and never confuse these two great dogmas with each other, but keep them apart, clearly and distinctly sepa-

rated. When the Church celebrates the feast of the Immaculate Conception as a holy day of obligation each year on the 8th of December, when we remember that this feast is the patronal feast of our own beloved country and that the Mother of God under this beautiful title of Mary Immaculate is our country's patron saint, and when we hear in sermons or read in books about Mary's Immaculate Conception—we will know well that this doctrine has absolutely no reference to the Virginal Birth of our Saviour, but refers exclusively to our Blessed Lady's preservation from original sin at her own birth, and even at the very first moment of her spotless existence.

Now of course the birth of Mary must have occurred many years before the pas-

sion and death of her Divine Son; and yet it was the merits of His passion and death which saved her from original sin. God, Who knows the future even as He knows the past and the present, foresaw in her favour those merits which His Only-Begotten Son would gain by His sufferings for us, and applied them to her soul long before they were gained. Nearly fifty years must have passed between Mary's immaculate conception and our Saviour's death on the cross, namely, the years of her own spotless life from its beginning to her motherhood, added to the thirty-three years of the mortal life of her Divine Son. Now God bridged over all those years in order to apply Christ's foreseen merits at the very first instant of her existence to the soul of her who was going

to be Christ's mother. Thus by this sublime privilege which God granted her, we might say, that Mary was redeemed about fifty years before the Redemption. We might say that she was not redeemed in the same manner as the rest of us, but that she was *fore-redeemed*, or, as one of the greatest popes has phrased it, "more sublimely redeemed."

Pope Pius IX. of blessed memory, when defining this dogma of faith, quoted from still earlier popes that "the most holy Virgin Mary, Mother of God, on account of the foreseen merits of Christ the Lord Redeemer, never was subject to original sin, but was entirely preserved from the sin of origin; and, therefore, redeemed in a sublimer manner." It was in the Vatican Basilica at Rome on the 8th

of December, 1854, that the venerated and saintly pontiff defined this dogma. There he yielded to the desires of the universal Church and made it clear for all future time that the ancient teaching is a matter of faith. In the presence of an immense multitude of cardinals and bishops from the most distant regions, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, Whose vicar on earth he was, by the authority of the blessed apostles, Peter and Paul, and by his own authority as visible and infallible head of the Church, he solemnly pronounced and defined: "that the doctrine which holds that the most Blessed Virgin Mary was by a singular privilege of God preserved immaculate from every stain of original sin at the first instant of her conception, was revealed by God, and

hence must be firmly and constantly believed by all the faithful." And from that day onwards to the end of time, whoever shall deliberately doubt the Immaculate Conception, or teach or hold that Mary was ever for one instant stained by the guilt of Adam's sin, will make shipwreck of the faith and will fall away from the unity of the Church.

And thus we know beyond the possibility of doubt that those infinite merits of our Divine Saviour, which have cleansed our souls in baptism, kept His blessed mother's radiant soul from ever needing to be cleansed. We know that she is the only human being who was never smirched by sin in any form, mortal or venial, actual or original. She is "our tainted nature's solitary boast." In

her alone human nature was never stained. Of all mankind, she alone was never even for the shortest moment under the foul dominion of Satan.

The Roman Breviary calls her "more beautiful than the sun," and declares that, "compared with light, she is found to be purer than it." "Thou art all-beautiful, O Mary, and original sin is not in thee!" "Macula non est in te." "White with the merits of many virtues," said St. Jerome fifteen hundred years ago, "whiter than snow with the gifts of the Holy Ghost."

So in her unique and surpassing beauty, she shines in heaven, our Mother and our Queen, the woman who crushed the serpent's head, the one solitary spotless human being who was never at any instant from the beginning to the end of her life

in the snares of Satan, or actively or passively turned away from God. "A woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars" (Apoc., xii., 1). The most glorious of God's angels would seem plain and insignificant compared with her. The cherubim and seraphim would pale beside her. For, although she is infinitely below God, yet she is vastly nearer to Him than any other created being.

Let us pray to her every day. Let us pray to her in life and at death. And may she, our Mother, always pray for us, until we become her worthy children. May she protect and prosper our beloved country, too, which has no queen save her, and of which she, the "Queen conceived without the stain of original sin," is the

patron saint. And as the centuries roll on, may millions and millions of its men and women and children prove their devotion to Mary Immaculate here on earth, and then rest at her feet in the glory of heaven.

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